N° XI.

THE THEATRICAL CENSOR.

BY A CITIZEN.

En vain je veux au moins faire grâce à quelqu'un :
Ma plume auroit regret d'en epargner aucun.

BOILEAU.

Ne'er be the dupe of names, however high;
For some outlive good parts—some misapply.

ARMSTRONG.

Talents usurp'd demand a Censor's rage.
A dunce is dunce, proscrib'd in ev'ry age. LLOYD.

Friday Evening, Jan. 31.

FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE CHILDREN OF THE LATE MR. HODGKINSON.

THE VOICE OF NATURE,

WITH

THE CHILDREN IN THE WOOD.

THE performance of this Evening could not fail to please. It was in the cause of humanity. A full house cheered the hearts of the little orphans, who exerted themselves to express their gratitude. We have not been more delighted this season than with " The Children in the Wood," in which Mr. Jefferson's *Walter* was particularly fine.

Saturday Evening, February 1.

DOUGLAS.

THIS popular play received fresh lustre on our boards this Evening from the *Glenalvon* of Mr. Fennell, which we con-

sider a highly finished performance. Mr. Cain, although he judiciously desisted from belabouring the stage with his bow, as formerly, made some egregious blunders. If Mr. Home could have heard his lines recited by Mr. Cain, who has no more idea of blank verse than he has of the *Sankright* language, he would have thrown them into the fire.

Mr. Cain must recollect that, in the "Sailor's Daughter," some time since, he pronounced the word *Sanscrit* as we have above written it; and, in the same play, he talked of *Doctor Commons*, instead of *Doctors' Commons*, the well-known resort of happy couples seeking licences, and unhappy widows seeking wills. Mrs. Melmoth's *Lady Randolph* was, as before, well done.

Monday Evening, Feb. 3.

OTHELLO.

Othello is a part peculiarly well adapted to the display of certain talents and graces in an actor, very far from trivial, but still much below those which belong to the higher efforts of his art. It is a showy, popular character; one that a performer might wisely select for the purpose of *setting himself off*. In all arts, there are subjects of this description. The painter, the musician, the singer, the orator, the writer, may each chuse for himself undertakings easy in execution, when compared with their brilliance in effect: undertakings, which rather shed lustre than receive. It is not that *Othello* is without its difficulties; but they are small, in proportion to its splendor. *Iago* is the principal, and more trying character.

So much nonsense has come from the mouths and pens of Mr. Fennell's worshippers (to use a term more appropriate than admirers) that we feel it to be the duty of the *Theatrical Censor* to speak distinctly to the merits of this gentleman. Mr. Fennell has from nature a good person, and (perhaps, we should say from Nature also, as well as) from education, a good carriage. There is a grace in his gesture, resulting (to speak technically) from this, that his limbs describe arches of circles, where those of men, whom we call stiff, awkward, or ungain, make angles. Add to this, if his voice be not al-

together what might be wished, he has, to counterbalance this defect, a good delivery; and this is a charm which softens the impression of many imperfections. He speaks correctly, and like a gentleman; a merit, this last, which is one of the rarest to be found on any stage. He can be calm, and he can be energetic. In what then can he be wanting? If the whole of the evidence upon which our judgment is to be formed be before us, he is wanting in pathos, feeling, enthusiasm. We do but transcribe the series of feelings that have actually passed in our own breasts, when we say, how often,—with our eye fixed upon him and satisfied, with our ear not unpleased with the language in his mouth, with our heart prepared to swell with the expanding sentiment,—has all ended in disappointment,

—— flat, stale, and unprofitable!

A thousand times has he forced into our recollection the reproach of *Macbeth*, on them

> That keep the word of promise to the ear,
> And break it to our hope.

There is in such acting as this, that false fulness, of which, in fine paintings of flowers, it has been exquisitely remarked, that they are to the eye all-perfect, but want, when we approach them, the life, the odour!

After all that we have here said, we shall offer no unqualified praise when we say that, in *Othello*, Mr. Fennell gave us much satisfaction. His "form and motion" became the "noble Moor." His whole scene with *Iago*, in the third act, with few exceptions, was a fine performance. His looks after *Desdemona*, his negligent answers to *Iago*, were of that species of *acting* upon which, in the largest and highest sense, we bestow the name: they savoured of nature. His—

> Villain, be sure you prove my love a whore;
> Be sure of it;—

which strikes us as the principal difficulty in the part, was well and impressively given; and his

—— give me the ocular proof,

drew from us no lukewarm admiration.

In the last scene, the words addressed to *Desdemona* were uttered with a certain coarseness, where it was only necessary to be stern; and though the lines "My wife! My

wife!" were pronounced with great effect, and much good acting was displayed, Mr. F. ought to have been able to move us still more than he did. From the entrance of *Montano*, to the end of the play, he pleased us exceedingly.

It struck us as singular, in this scene, that Mr. F. left the room, to fetch a sword. If we are not mistaken too, he said, "I have another weapon." All this might be the consequence of accident. We have only to remark that there is nothing of the kind in the text. *Othello* does not leave the room, and his words are—

> Behold! I have a weapon, &c.

His "Farewel the tranquil mind!" was excellent; and we believe there are few of our readers, among those who witnessed Mr. F.'s performance, that will not thank us for transcribing the following lines, which they heard with so much pleasure, and in which the poet has placed jealousy on so magnanimous a footing:

> Had it pleased heaven
> To try me with affliction; had he rain'd
> All kinds of sores and shames on my bare head;
> Steep'd me in poverty to the very lips;
> Given to captivity me and my utmost hopes;
> I should have found in some place of my soul
> A drop of patience: but, alas! to make me
> A fixed figure for the time of scorn
> To point his slow unmoving finger at,—
> Oh! Oh!
> Yet, I could bear that too; well, very well;
> But there, where I have garner'd up my heart,
> Where either I must live, or bear no life;
> The fountain from the which my current runs,
> Or else dries up; to be discarded thence!
> Or keep it as a cistern, for foul toads
> To knot and gender in!—turn thy somplexion there,
> Patience, thou young and rose-lipp'd cherubim,
> Ay, there, look grim as hell!

We have intimated that Mr. F. looked the character well; but we must take a decided exception to his colour. He was rather a *Red-man* than a *Moor;* and this inconsistency was the less pardonable, on account of the references so frequently made to the black complexion of *Othello;* references which ought to over-rule all arguments founded on the unfavourableness of a black skin to the display of the passions. Mr. F. wore black gloves, as if to put us in mind that his face ought

to have been somewhat of the same hue. As it was, every thing said of what might have been expected from *Desdemona's* feelings, with regard to his colour, sounded most ridiculously; for Mr. F.'s *Othello* was only a hale, sun-burnt soldier.

There was much to censure in Mr. F.'s address to the *Duke* in council. The radical defect consisted in this, that in reality his speech was addressed to the audience, and not to the *Duke*, whom Mr. F. treated like a man of straw. The consequence of such an error is always very fatal to an actor. He falls into loose declamation, instead of adhering to that direct, and, in short, respectful recital which he would necessarily give, if he kept his eye upon the person to whom he speaks, and behaved as if he were really "in such a presence" as he appears, and not merely standing before a brother-player, whom, perhaps, he treats with little ceremony behind the scenes. This fault is very common in actors; and we shall here notice two or three of the instances we remarked this evening. Mr. M'Kenzie, as *Cassio*, spoke to Mr. Warren, as *Brabantio*, with his arms folded; apparently wholly forgetful that he was addressing a Magnifico of Venice. The same gentleman, instead of leaving *Desdemona* with a bow, gave her a familiar nod: we were glad *Iago* did not see it. Mr. Rutherford did not think it necessary to remain "unbonnetted" before the governor of Cyprus, and generalissimo of the Republic. Even Mr. Fennell fell into a capital impropriety of this kind. After *Othello* has told *Montano*

——— myself will be your surgeon,

Mr. F. makes him not only enter his castle-gate first, but shut it after him, upon the wounded man. Was this decent? Was it the behaviour of a gentleman? Did it befit a gentleman that fetched his

——— life and being
From men of royal siege?

Was it the courtesy of a person so high in office? According to the text, *Montano* should be led in, while *Othello* is finishing his speech.

In delivering the line

But that I love the gentle Desdemona—

Mr. F. indulged in a style of acting, which we must always

condemn. Could not *Othello* express the enthusiasm of passion without the clasped hands, soft voice, and averted visage,

—— like a sick girl?

All this is proper, upon occasion; but not upon an occasion like that of *Othello*'s, in this speech.

We shall close these animadversions, adding to what we have set down before, new examples of Mr. Fennell's unfortunate choice of emphatic words. From several which we observed, we shall select only two:

And little of this great world can I speak:

Here, Mr. F. dwells upon *world*, to the destruction of the cadence of the verse, and to the neglect of the word *great*, in which consists the idea. Again:

Thy husband knew it all.
Æmil. My husband?
Oth. Thy husband.
Æmil. That she was false to wedlock?
Oth. Ay, with Cassio. Nay, had she been true,
If heaven would make me such another world
Of one entire and perfect chrysolite,
I'd not have sold her for it.
Æmil. My husband?
Oth. Ay, 'twas he that told me first;
An honest man he is, and hates the slime
That sticks on filthy deeds.
Æmil. My husband?
Oth. What needs this iteration, woman?
I say thy husband.

It might be thought obvious to every reader, that *Æmilia*'s question is, as Mrs. Melmoth gave it, whether it were *her* husband? But Mr. F. makes *Othello* think that she inquires whether it could be her *husband*, and not rather her brother, cousin-german, sister, or grand-daughter, and, therefore, answers (instead of *Thy* husband), Thy *husband*.

We paid close attention to Mr. Wood. This gentleman's zeal in his profession calls for every possible encouragement. Are we to be glad, or sorry, that he had one radical defect this evening, that of not looking like a villain? For this, he is partly to blame, or to thank, Nature; but the rest depends upon his skill in the mimic art. Not only his person and voice, but his manner, had in it too much of ingenuous youth. He did not seem to conceive, or he was unable to give, the

cold, sarcastic, hardened wickedness of *Iago*. It was thus in his conversations with *Roderigo;* and, when *Othello*, in a transport of rage, caught hold on him, he displayed real timidity, while his inward sentiment should have been, "My medicine works!" We were much pleased with him in the last scene.

Mr. Wood delivered—

> Cassio's a proper man,

in the sense of "Cassio's a *fit* man for my purpose;" whereas the meaning is, "Cassio's a *handsome* man;" that he is *therefore* a *fit* man is implied.

In the lines—

> If this poor *trash* of Venice, whom I *trash*
> For his quick hunting,

Mr. W. lost the play on the word, by pronouncing *I trash*, I *traish*, or *trace*, for we are not sure which. To *trash a hound*, say the commentators, is to *correct*, to *rate*. Mr. W. has a disagreeable habit, some instances of which we have before pointed out, of slurring over the vowel in the final syllable. Thus, he pronounces *Michael*, which, in strictness, is *Michaël*, Mi*chle*; and Cyprus, *Cypress*, or *Cypris*. Allowing for these imperfections of speech, and a general false colouring, Mr. W. often excited our approbation.

In one sense, we may say that Mr. Jefferson played the "silly gentleman" to a miracle. He should have aimed at something more respectable, however; if only in conformity with that sentiment which he heard even on the scene: "They say, base men, being in love, have then a nobility in their natures more than is native to them." But, is it possible that Mr. J. recollected he was representing "a Venetian gentleman?" or does he imagine that a "Venetian gentleman" ever did, or does, bear a shadow of resemblance to those Philadelphia *gentlemen*, who crack nuts, and wear their hats in the boxes, and sit before the ladies? It certainly required the full stretch of Mr. J.'s genius to make what he did of this character; and we lament, for his sake, the omission of one of the characters of the piece, as written by SHAKESPEAR; that of the "Clown, servant to the Moor," in which he would have shone. No Clown, in a pantomime, ever committed greater extravagances than Mr. J. in *Roderigo*, particularly

in his death; and we might recommend him to hold, on this subject, the same language as that which fell from his own lips in the farce,—" a good joke;—and yet, now I think on " it again, I find it is no joke at all;" but, in truth, however we may condemn him, Mr. J. is perfectly in the right: he pleases, what he may reasonably make his sole concern to please, a *discerning* public; but it makes us tremble for Mr. Fennell's precarious popularity: for, should Mr. J. ever take it into his head, in addition to his present accomplishments, to eat fire and pin-cushions, or draw some threescore yard of ribband from his mouth, *Othello*, and *Hamlet*, and *Penruddock*, will be played to vacant benches.

Mr. M'Kenzie, as *Cassio*, was not entirely deficient in the drunken scene but his—

Well,—heaven's above all; and there be souls that must be saved, and there be souls that must not be saved;

For my own part,—no offence to the general, nor any man of quality,—I hope to be saved;

wanted a certain seriousness. It must have fallen within the observation of Mr. M'Kenzie, as well as of SHAKESPEAR, that men in liquor frequently fall upon grave and even religious topics. Such language as that of *Cassio* springs from the sinking of the spirits which often attends drunkenness. His—

Forgive us our sins!

was better. *Bestial* is not to be pronounced *beastial*. For the rest, it would be idle to expect from Mr. M'Kenzie the graces with which *Cassio* ought to be adorned.

Mrs. Wignell did not look, nor speak, like *Desdemona;* but, in the bed-scene she displayed, perhaps, as much nature as the circumstances allow. This would be a frightful scene, indeed, were it fully represented. It must be treated superficially, to be supportable. We doubt not, that if any thing like a real *smothering* were to be exhibited, the audience, unable to contain themselves, would rush upon the stage to stop the murder.*

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* In witnessing a well-played drama, the passions may become so far engaged as to lose sight of its fictitious character. A gentleman, at a representation of *As You Like It*, was so filled with anxiety for the fate of *Adam*, that, after burning with impatience through a great part of *Orlando*'s conversation with the *Duke*, he at length exclaimed, with violent emotion, " My God! he stands talking there, and the old man will be starved." Let us add, this was a fine, and, at the same time, severe criticism on Shakspear.

Mrs. Wignell makes *treeüly* of *truly*, *bleeü* of *blue*, &c.

Mrs. Melmoth did great justice to *Æmilia*. Her zeal for the honour of *Desdemona*, her affliction, her most honest rage, were truly moving.

On the whole, it will have been seen, that we were not displeased with the representation of *Othello*. We account it, taken altogether, a respectable and gratifying performance. We can feel, and express admiration; but it is our business to particularize defects, with the wholesome view of promoting amendment. Calling to mind our office, our duty to the public, we may say with *Iago*,

——— I am nothing, if not *critical*.

We should be happy to see Mr. Fennell in *Romeo*.

THE SHIPWRECK.

This little Opera was marred by deficiency in an essential point, that of the songs. Several were omitted by the female characters, and we cannot praise those which they gave. Mrs. Woodham had a pleasing appearance, but we were long before we discovered that she intended to use the Irish accent. Mr. Harwood is an actor of real merit. Mr. Jefferson, in *Stave*, was all we could wish. It delights us to see this gentleman do so much justice to himself as he did in this character. We find it absolutely painful to us to reiterate the complaints we make against him; but he allows us no alternative. We must either pass him over in silence, which were to be most unjust to his abilities, or submit, from time to time, to record his abuse of them.

"A B C."——NOAH WEBSTER.

Mr. Censor,

IT is a melancholy, but I am afraid but too just, reflection on our common nature, that we seldom love or discover even truth itself, except through the medium of passion. Sir, I confess that I believe I should never have criticised the *Repository*, but for an affront personal, or what I may be allowed to resent still more deeply, an affront to a near and dear friend. Upon referring to the sixth number of the work, you will find, under the head of "*To Correspondents*," a notice that "Leander is too incorrect for this publication." *Hinc illæ lachrymæ!* Poor, dear Leander! Sir, if you will believe me, Leander sent as pretty a prosaic production (for prose and prosaic have the same sig-

nification, I find; and writing *prose*, no doubt, is *prosing*); I repeat it, sir, as pretty a prosaic production as you could wish to see. I know all about it, for I helped him in his spelling, and almost learnt the piece by heart. Well, sir—the end of it is, that we are told, and in the *Repository* too, that "LEANDER is too incorrect for publication"! No sooner had I read this, than, feeling for my friend's sake all the rage of a disappointed author, I vowed vengeance against a paper which I had previously prized with all the blindness of admiration. What, said I, shall BOB AT'EM, and JACOBUS, and TOMMY TICKLE, roll their mellifluous periods, and Solomon Slender cut jokes, and P criticise the stage, and my bosom-friend, LEANDER, not be allowed to troll his smooth polysyllables! "LEANDER too incorrect!" cried I; and is it so hard to be—

A decent priest, where monkies are the gods?

You have now, Mr. Censor, a frank avowal of the motives upon which I became your correspondent. I indulged a hope, in which I have not been disappointed, that you would be less fastidious in your acceptance of the *favours* that might be sent to you; and I chose the dramatic strictures of the *Repository* for the field of my animadversion, as the most likely means of inducing you to put me into print.

Sir, I could give you an affecting, but needless, description of the anxiety with which LEANDER (and myself through love of him) waited for the publication of the Sixth Number. Suffice it to say, that though late, it came at last. A similar delay has attended the Seventh. The cause, indeed, is visible enough; such compositions as P's and mine are not to be done in a hurry.

But to make short.—In the Seventh, is a second piece of over-delicacy. "The author" (who is indeed unknown to me) "of the '*Mad* "*Mother*,' a poem," is told that he "probably transcribed it from the "walls of Bedlam!"—In this manner, sir, they treat a poet, at the very instant in which they quote two of his verses, to be the glory and the shame of their volume:

"She talked and sung the woods among,
"And it was in the English tongue."

"In the English tongue," sir, and they have thrown it behind the fire! a work, to which they could not produce any thing similar, if they were to write for a twelvemonth! "In the English tongue"! and Solomon Slender could let a novelty like this slip through his fingers? May his readers never forgive him! For my part, sir, had this "Mad Mother," warbled through the *Repository*,

. . . . . in the English tongue,

I could have listened

. . . . . till the round world dissolv'd!

Yes! she had "method in her madness;" she was "mad only north-"north-west;" when the wind was southerly, she knew a hawk from a "hand-saw;" and that is a great deal more than falls to the share of some folk, who, after all, never think themselves mad, be the wind in what point it may.

No! Mr. Censor, I never can, I never will forgive him. That he should not know the value of a piece of plain English, when he had it

in his hands, is past all bearing. He should have preserved it as we do those ancient inscriptions of which we know the rarity, if not the meaning. The language alone should have insured its reception: it were

> praise enough
> To fill the ambition of a private man,
> That Chatham's language was his mother tongue.

So much for the piece, sir, which this Hun, this Vandal, this Omar, has thrust under his coffee-pot! You may think me warm upon the subject; but be so good as to consider at once the merits of these prosaic and poetic productions and the airs of those by whom they have been neglected. There are no two things upon this earth for which I have more tenderness, than ignorance and folly; and this through the profoundest fellow-feeling: but when they are accompanied by that arrogance with which learning and genius alone have a right to disgrace themselves, shall I not acknowledge it, they move my temper? Do but think of LEANDER, and his brother in injury, splitting open the leaves of the *Repository* with their thumbs, all trepidation, to behold their signatures, and finding—

> A blank, my lord, a blank!
>
> for the *book of knowledge* fair,
> Presented with a universal blank!

I come at length to P, and his account of "the representation of the drama":

> Methinks I hear some critic *Post!**

I say, methinks, for, alas! I too find "a blank, my lord, a blank:" P has vanished! Sufficient traces, however, remain, I think, to shew the work to be his own; but if it turn out that this star has actually quitted our horizon, I can compare his short-lived blaze with nothing but those extraordinary bodies, the temporary appearances of which have been recorded by astronomers. At any rate, I flatter myself he has not yet entirely left us, but that we shall continue long to enjoy the *twilight*, which, indeed, as much as we have been used to, and of which, owing to the refraction occasioned by the denseness of a certain medium, we may long hope the continuance:

> The sun sets in night, and the stars shun the day,
> But their glory remains when their lights fade away.

If, however, I deceive myself, and he has actually passed the *finitor*, I protest to you that I will do my best at an elegy: *he was a fellow of infinite jest.*

Mr. Censor, one of the first marks I discover of the "celestial intellect" of our critic, is a passage concerning "the author of Night Thoughts," which, if I were uncharitable, I should deem profane; because I can understand by "the author of Night Thoughts" none but Him whom, upon this occasion, it would ill become me to name. I pass to Mr. FENNELL, a "mortal god," who is praised for "accuracy

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* Churchill.

" in his attitudes, and correctness in his gestures." I had determined to devote a day or two to the discovery of the full difference between the things here spoken of; but I am too much attracted by the " accuracy" of the critic's quotation, " involuntary *applause;*" and by one of those PÆANS which are called for in the *United States' Gazette*, and on which I may expatiate in another letter.

" On Mr. Taylor, in Don Alvarez, we bestow the tender tear of pity." Poor Mr. Taylor! for I too am melted at so much tenderness. His words are a very onion to my eyes; and to this cause I am half disposed to attribute it, that I cannot *see clear*, through P.'s whole performance. Is it the fault of my eyes, or is the following a real riddle?—" On a minute investigation, we could not find him the " least remiss, either in conception or expression, but truly estimated " proportion in holding the *mirror up to nature.*" I believe the riddle I extracted in my first letter ended with the " mirror up to nature": —*There's something more than natural in all this, if philosophy could find it out.*

And I have found it out! Why, Mr. Censor, the *Repository* is neither more nor less than a *Riddle*-book! It is published by a *Riddle*, there is a *riddle* in every page, and it is a *riddle* from beginning to end:

Riddle my riddle, my re,
Who can tell what this riddle may be?

Yours, HORNBOOK.

THE ENGRAVING.

What with the care of retouching so many portraits (some of which were procured only by stealth, and few of the gentlemen represented in the others *sat quietly* on the occasion), added to the anxiety of our patient artist to preserve them under the graver, it has been the utmost we could do to bring forward the present number, even at this late hour; and we must rely on the kindness of our Subscribers for their pardon at once for this delay, and for the omission of a full description of the plate, which we find ourselves obliged to reserve for No. XII. There is one particular, however, on which we think it proper to throw light immediately. The *thin* gentleman is no other than Solomon Slender, Esq. the slender Solomon of the Ladies' *Repository;* and the long slip of paper, which might be erroneously supposed to contain some vulgar ballad, and from which, in his *Editorial* capacity, he is reading to the company, is nothing less than an ODE, composed by the gentlemen who " club their wits," in honour of themselves, &c. A copy of this ODE we have been fortunate enough to obtain; and, with a multitude of notes, critical, explanatory, &c. &c. various readings, conjectural readings, *new readings*, &c. it will be printed in the same number XII.—We learn that the club is henceforth to be called the PÆAN CLUB.

The price of this work is 50 cents for four numbers. To be had at No. 42, Walnut-street, and at Mr. Phillips's Circulating Library, south Fourth-street. Communications, and orders from the country, received at the former place.